

“What have you done for conservation lately?”

By Seth T. Schoon

Do you ever walk out on your porch after a long, misty rain and smell the air? That fresh smell after millions of rain droplets have descended to the earth. Well, that smell is actually called geosmin and is caused by decaying soil microbes. We, as humans, can pick up on this smell easier than a shark can blood. That fresh smell after a long rain is another reminder that soil conservation is a huge part of life on earth.

When it comes to being a good steward of land and resources I am adamant that conservation is key. God’s Word gives us a better understanding of why we should be good stewards through verses like Psalm 24:1,” The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” I firmly believe that the earth is the Lord’s and that we must use conservation to fulfill our responsibility to take care of it. As I have thus far related why I am an avid conservationist, I will now reveal what I have done for conservation recently.

I graze out my livestock, which consists of sheep and a horse, on native rangeland. The fact that a clean, open, and native habitat has proven most productive for ruminants has been evident to me because I was raised with a strong sense of appreciation for the wide open prairie. Though I am but a novice I understand that the land must be properly taken care of to sustain healthy native grasses. That is why I use rotational grazing to make sure the land properly heals and is stimulated to grow heartier after being grazed.

In the winter months I help to roll out hay bales on our pasture to feed my livestock. As the animals eat and live in that pasture for the winter months they lay down a layer of manure. As summer days approach green leaves pop up through that hay and manure. Nutrients from the manure infiltrate, as the snow and rain seep them into the soil. Then

the grasses flourish. As the strong South Dakota winds sweep across our land it is a satisfaction to know that the remaining stubble left out on the pastures keep snow from drifting away. When the snow stays on our land it infiltrates on our land and we will have more moisture in the soil to sustain grass throughout the summer. This is an important factor in good conservation that takes place if we are correctly grazing our grasslands.

People must realize that good conservation principles for native grassland are not inscrutable but can be done when one has a desire to do so. I enjoy using good conservation principles on our land because it pays dividends. I have healthier livestock, better soil moisture, heartier rangeland, and healthier soil organisms because of conservation. There are fewer weeds and a diverse mix of native grasses that flourish on land managed this way.

I have managed my livestock and our land according to conservation principles with guidance from my father. I will continue to use these principles because it helps me live out my faith, and improves the land, so that future generations can enjoy the ranching way of life. There will also be cleaner water, air, soil, and grass with healthier animals and people. When stewarding God's land, our prairie, conservation will abundantly reward my animals, my land, and a hungry world.